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ABSTRACT

The paper explains how political science educators at the University of Michigan, Dearborn, structured political internship experiences for American college students in the Ontario, Canada, legislature and Metropolitan Toronto government. The internship program allows junior and senior undergraduate political science majors to work for five weeks with Canadian legislators, Ontario ombudsmen, and candidates for Canadian political office. The emphasis of the program is on the development of broader political understanding of a foreign country and on comparison of the American political system to that of another country. The program provides experiences in keeping a daily journal of political observations, participating in major political events which take place during the internship, working directly with parliamentary and municipal officials, reading extensively in the area of Canadian Federal and Provincial systems, and meeting weekly in a seminar with other interns to discuss readings, experiences, and observations. Strengths of the program are identified as diffusion of political ethnocentrism, development of a broader view of political organization, opportunity to work in a political office, realization that different governments fashion different solutions to political and policy problems, and introduction to role models and policy contacts for young interns. (DB)

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COMPARATIVE POLITICAL INTERNSHIPS:

ASSURING ACADEMIC VALIDITY

by

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SO 011 881

Prepared for presentation at the annual meeting of American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., August 31-September 3, 1979.

What distinguishes a comparative political internship experience, from other political experiences?

Any internship setting, in the seat of a foreign government, whether the British House of Commons, the French National Assembly, or the Ontario Provincial Legislature, provides the opportunity for comparative political experience. Frantzich observes, however, that "the intern who returns to campus with nothing more than a random set of observations has not taken full advantage of the opportunity available".[1] How then, can a comparative political internship be structured for academic validity? How can we assure the student something more than "a random set of observations"? To do this, the intern must be provided with an academic structure generating data that support or refute the intern's beliefs about the political world.[2] Some mechanism must be provided for testing hypotheses and a priori conjectures.

The Toronto Internship

This paper deals with the academic structuring of a comparative political experience in the Ontario Legislature, and Metropolitan Toronto government. The program was organized in 1977 and has been offered, for the past three years ('77, '78, '79) during the Mini-Spring Term, early May to mid-June. Forty junior and senior undergraduates, Political Science majors, have participated. The majority of students have been from the University of Michigan-Dearborn, although students from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, Olivet College, Duke University and University of Southern California-Davis, have been admitted. Most of the placements have been with members of the Ontario Legislature, representing the 3 major provincial political parties. Several students have been placed with the

Ontario Ombudsman and each year one or two students have assignments in Toronto City Hall with Aldermen. The placements are for a 5 week period. The students are in placement 5 days a week and meet the Director in Seminar once a week in the evening. Since Parliament meets Tuesday and Thursday evenings and sometimes Monday, the workday often extends from 9 a.m. till 10:30 p.m. Students earn 6 hours of academic credit.

All the '79 interns participated in the 'Federal' Election for one weeks time, due to temporal overlap of the election and the start of the internship. They were assigned to Federal candidates of the 3 major parties in Metro-Toronto before taking their parliamentary and municipal placements in the provincial legislature and the city hall. Most of the '77 interns participated in a 'provincial' election called at the time of the internship. Since the legislature was adjourned they missed the full legislative experience. The '78 interns had only a legislative experience. The '79 interns had the best of both worlds, both electoral and legislative experiences. Effort has been made, since the inception of the program to take advantage of whatever political events are central during the intensive five week internship.

"Think Canadian" Saturation Orientation

An American Political Science undergraduate's attention is not focussed on Canada. It is fixed on Washington and, for Michigan students, on Lansing. While a prerequisite for the Internship experience is a course in Comparative Politics, this base has proved to be rather thin. After the first year's experience, the "Think Canadian" Saturation Orientation program was devised as a no credit mini-course. The readings list includes materials on the Canadian Federal and Provincial systems. Very little of the reading material

deals directly with Ontario. One study, "How the Legislature Spends Its Time", published by the Ontario Commission on the Legislature has been very helpful. This is supplemented by the Ontario Hansard and biographical material on the Legislators. Students are instructed to read, daily, the Toronto Globe and Mail, to listen to CBC radio stations in nearby Windsor, Sarnia and Chatham and to view Channel 9 for CBC national news. During the orientation, sessions are scheduled in the Windsor riding office of an M.P.P. (Member of the Provincial Parliament), and several lectures are given by guest faculty from the Political Science Department of the University of Windsor. Any Canadians we have on the faculty are involved. A session is always scheduled with the Canadian Consulate in Detroit. The consular office provides the students with very pragmatic advise on currency exchange, customs regulations, restaurants, maps and other Canadiana materials. With this brief, but intense, orientation some base is set for the mini-term to follow.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE POLITICAL JOURNAL EXPERIENCE

Intern assessment and reflection on the comparative experience is needed to bring about testing and revision of beliefs about the political world. Political internship literature posits 'Journal' writing as one way of achieving this goal. Virtually nothing, however, is written on how to further structure this vehicle in order to achieve the intended results. The format used in the Toronto Internship for the achievement of these goals is now described.

Political Journal Format

The Political Journal is written each placement day. On a daily basis the Journal entries include: a log (time frame of activities)

and the recording of questions (no fewer than 3 each day). No answers are required, only questions. On a weekly basis the following entries are added: a discussion essay section, in which either one facet of the week/s experience, or the overall week's impact is dealt with in detail; high points, low points, new language and at least one 'quote of the week'.

Log writing is an experience in brevity and conciseness akin to the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE of the lead paragraph of a news story.

The Questions and Discussion sections are the core of the Journal. Together they give the Director, and the intern, a good sample of the intern's perceptions, insights, question posing ability and political curiosity.

An important aspect of the questions section of the format is to require that the interns use 'their' questions in the placement as instruments in an 'assertive informational pursuit'. They are expected to get the answers to questions which they find interesting.

VALUES AND BENEFITS OF A COMPARATIVE POLITICAL EXPERIENCE

Diffusing Political Ethnocentrism

Confronting a parliamentary system, students have the opportunity to develop a broader and less parochial view of political organization. Diffusion of political ethnocentrism is one major benefit of a comparative political internship program. This finding is based on analysis of 1977 intern Journal questions and discussions, and confirmed by an analysis of '78-'79 Journals.

In '77, student questions, throughout the 5 week experience, reflected a feeling for the superiority of our separation-of-powers system to a parliamentary system.[3] There were many questions regarding the dangers of

'majority government' without our 'checks and balances'; an attachment to the norm that a candidate must live in the district served to adequately represent it; and fear of 'power' concentrated in a cohesive 'disciplined' party. A written Constitution, "like the U.S.", was seen as a solution to the Canadian unity question. Often questions reflected the notion, "Why aren't the Canadians more like us?" coupled with a defensiveness, "Why do Canadians blame everything bad on Americans, such as massage parlors?".

Analysis of '78, '79 Journal questions and discussions reveal other political ethnocentric patterns:

> "Why are Canadians more uninformed than the average American?"
>
> "Is an ideological framework or lack of it a valid means of measuring the worth of a party?"
>
> "It has been said that the Canadians lack a true sense of identity. If a proposal was set forth for Canada to become part of the U.S., would Canadians stand firm to the fact, or would they be willing to join the USA and say "we are Americans" and be happy to adopt the American identity?"

This question was posed in '78, a year before Three Mile Island:

> "Why is there a fundamental difference between the reaction of the Canadian public and the American public on the question of nuclear power? Is there some element in the system which has contributed to this difference with the American people very distressed over nuclear power and the Canadians, for the most part, nonplussed by the potential problems of nuclear energy?"

American students have been taught very well by American Political Scientists:

> "How can the constituency of the Speaker be represented if the Speaker does not get involved with committees and does not help introduce legislation? Then isn't this constituency getting an unfair deal?"
>
> "How can one man's opinion (the Premier's) overrule the somewhat more democratic vote in the House' (this incident related to a vote on a Private Members bill having to do with French Language Services). The student wrote. . . "Davis' (The Premier) announcement awakened me to the power of the premier. I was rather upset

> to see the kind of power he had. At first I was shocked by the blow he had struck against democracy. After his response in the House, I'm a bit more calmed and realize that the Progressive Conservative Government will probably introduce a similar bill after all".
>
> "Why is the Ontario Legislature so worried that the power of the party would be diminished if subcommittees were created?" The student comments. . ."it would be practical, with the benefits exceeding the costs, for the Ontario Legislature to examine and adopt a subcommittee system".

For most of the students, the Toronto Internship will be their first work experience in a political office and their first experience as privileged observers of any legislative scene. They see, first hand, political maneuvering on the floor of the House and in the committees. They witness political procedures, rules, and political games. They become aware of the importance of staff, the critical role of the press, the impenetrability of the bureaucracy, and the flow of political information. For American students, it will be the first time they have encountered an 'ideological' party like the New Democrat Party. The Journal questions and discussions reflect all these things. Here are some examples:

> How widely is it recognized among the public that the success of the parties at Queen's Park is highly dependent on the quality of their research staffs?
>
> When do opposition researchers feel they have done a good job--when they have put together a good research effort, or when their research has caused the government embarrassment?
>
> Is the NDP a truly Socialist party or a more practical labor oriented third party?
>
> Does the NDP believe they have a monopoly on virtue? Would the NDP temper their idealism if they gained power in Ontario?
>
> How effective are the committees as policy innovators?
>
> How do Cabinet members, combining both administrative and legislative duties, handle this complex job of heading a Ministry and being chief legislator in a policy area?

Does the press make issues much more important in the public eye and do the M.P.P's correspondingly respond to this 'issue creating ability' or do the M.P.P's use the press to push certain issues to the forefront of the public arena?

Why is it so difficult to get information from the Ministries concerning funding of programs?

How is it that the opposition parties constantly fail to get enough votes to defeat the government, or, is this a reason that they never have enough members to win a vote?

A Different Political Party Spectrum

A second benefit delineated in the '77 analysis is that interns find a different political party spectrum in Canada.[4] Political debate and public discussion, on a range of economic and social issues, in Ontario is distinctly to the 'left' of their American experience. Trying to 'fit' the 3 Ontario parties into the American political right-left continuum leaves them confused. During the Ontario provincial election in '77, the interns witnessed the appearance of such minor party candidates as Communists and Marxists-Leninists speaking at 'All Candidates Meetings". One intern stated, "How is it that in the 'all candidates meeting, the minor parties were allowed to speak so freely? Is it due to the longer tradition of tolerance in Canada than in the U.S.? Why don't the Communists and the Revolutionary Marxists meet the same hostility as in the U.S.?"

The '79 interns posed these questions about the Ontario political spectrum:

"Why has a Socialist party survived in Canada and not in the U.S.?"

"Why do most Tories recognize the need for government intervention, whereas most Republicans don't?"

"Has the U.S. presidential system, with its strict division of powers, inhibited the development of a Labour Party as in Canada and Britain?"

"Does the Liberal Party more closely resemble American parties than Canadian parties, such as the New Democratic and the Progressive Conservatives, in its lack of a strong, coherent ideological base?"

"To what extent do the unions influence and/or control New Democratic Party policy?"

Confronting Inexperience

A third benefit of the Toronto Internship is that the interns become more curious about the American political system and must confront their own inexperience and lack of knowledge.[5] Examples:

"Do state legislators in Michigan get personally involved in workman's compensation cases as do their Ontario counterparts?"

"Do Torontonians find their Aldermen more accessible than our citizens find the Detroit City Council?"

"Why am I unaware and uninformed on the acid rain problem especially since the U.S. seems to be in worse shape than Canada?"

Similarity of Political and Policy Problems and Different Solutions

A fourth benefit of the Toronto Internship is learning the similarity of Canadian/American political and policy problems and the different solutions fashioned by different governments.[6]

The Discussion Section of the Journal provides the intern with an opportunity to integrate their experiences in a larger context and to exercise analytic skills in dealing with issues of Canadian political life. Examples from the discussion section of three '79 interns, one each with the Progressive-Conservative, Liberal and New Democratic Party, will illustrate the dimensions of this fourth benefit.

Discussion sections written by an Intern with a Progressive-Conservative placement:

First week: "The role of the Undecided Voter in the 1979 Canadian Federal Election". The question posed was whether the election was won on the basis of issues, partisanship, candidate evaluation or a combination of these factors. The intern's analysis of the Trudeau, Clark and Broadbent campaigns convinced him that it was candidate evaluation by the undecided voters that made the difference.

Second week: "Why was John Bosley (Progressive-Conservative candidate) so successful?" The intern did an analysis of 4 areas representing the extremes of the Don Valley West Riding where the Progressive Conservatives advanced. The New Democratic Party improved their percentages as well. He concluded that the Bosley victory hinged on 1) Pierre Trudeau, 2) the economy and 3) John Bosley. "But the coup de grace was the campaign organization".

Third week: "The Individual Member of the Provincial Parliament". The intern discussed the small staff that constrains the individual M.P.P. activities. He wonders what an M.P.P. whose constituency conflicted with a party position would do. He contrasts what would happen in the U.S. in such a situation. He develops the hypothesis that the benefits of individuality of a legislator will exceed the cost of party discipline. "The strength of the party is its individual members".

Fourth week: "Subcommittees in the Ontario Legislature". The intern discusses the problem of the need for flexibility and specialization in the legislature. He relates his own experience in sitting in committees, where he notes that "it isn't difficult to realize that much time is lost over just setting an agenda". He advises subcommittees as a needed Ontario legislative reform.

Fifth week: "Health Care System in Ontario". He notes that the Ontario Health Insurance Program leashed the health services costs and advises American politicians to check out the Canadian system as an example in dealing with runaway health care costs.

Discussion sections written by an intern with the LIBERAL Party:

First week: "On Losing an Election and the Role of the Elderly in Society". This intern was impressed with how well Canadians treat their elderly, as experienced by him in his visits with his Federal Candidate to Homes for the Elderly. He thought Americans could learn some things about geriatric care from the Canadians. He experienced losing an election as a painful process. "The candidate suffers the most as he must cover up his sorrow to console the party workers".

Second week: "Nuclear Power and the Differences between the American and Canadian nuclear energy systems". The intern is troubled that neither country has come to grips with the problem of nuclear waste (spent fuel). He concludes, "Does nuclear power present a threat to democratic societies because only a small technocratic elite understand it and thus only they can make decisions relating to it? Considering the importance of energy to a nation, it seems foreboding that only a very small elite can make inteliigent decisions concerning nuclear power".

Third week: "Environmental Problems: the most effective methods of controlling industrial pollution." He discusses using fines strictly enforced by the courts; or would fines be injurious to less prosperous

firms, running them out of business, thereby creating unemployment? "One answer is to provide less prosperous firms with public funds to allow them to install pollution abatement equipment". He concludes that health problems created by pollution outweigh the problems caused by lack of competition. "Industrialists must be given an economic incentive to install pollution abatement equipment--without any incentive, they will never install the equipment".

Fourth week: "The Role of the Speaker in the House". The intern discusses how vastly different his duties are in a parliamentary system than in a presidential system.

Fifth week: "Question Period Briefing". The intern is fascinated as to how decisions get made and by whom in the Question Period Briefing; how main questions and supplementaries are formulated for Question period. He considers the role of the press, and the tough job researchers have who need to bring hard data for consideration. The most difficult role is that of the Opposition Leader who has to guard against soft data and yet gain the respect of his staff. His is the ultimate responsibility.

Discussion sections written by an intern with the New Democratic Party:

First week: "Bill 19", a bill under consideration by the government to amalgamate two education ministries in the province--that of primary/secondary education with post-secondary education. The intern examines the bill and compares this with the Michigan situation.

Second week: "The Crown, the Canadian Constitution and the British North America Act". The intern discusses the meaning of the relationship of the Crown, its institutional manifestations in Canada and how it relates to the needs of the majority of Canadians. The intern is very bothered about the Canadian Constitution and the British North America Act. "A simple act of Parliament could abolish the Supreme Court of Canada or take away the Canadian Bill of Rights because they are not entrenched anywhere; they are only created by statute".

Third and Fourth week: "The inadequacies of the Workman's Compensation" and some horror stories.

Fifth week: "Civil Rights in Canada without an entrenched Bill of Rights". The intern gave two examples of violations of individual rights under the Padlock Act of Quebec and the Alberta Education Act. These acts were ruled against by the Supreme Court of Canada, but not for reasons of civil rights violations.

Some Unexpected Similarities in Social Problems

While campaigning door to door, one of the interns observed: "Some things I hadn't expected were the deep seated undercoat of racism which I

found in many of the more WASP'Y citizens. The roots of a Canadian racial problem are clearly visible, yet everyone is attempting to do their best to deny that one exists. The claim of a 'cultural mosaic' is held high by Canadians as an excuse for what is very dangerous benign neglect".

One of the young women interns did a special paper on the Status of Women in Ontario. She was disappointed. "Here in Canada, "equality" is being achieved with little organization by women". She observes, "If the Equal Rights Amendment is passed in the U.S. it will be a big boost for non-discriminatory laws around the world".

New Political Language

A fifth value was the acquisition of new political language.[7] The interns heard and learned the vivid language of the Queen's Park politicians: turfed out, The old Warrior, Blue Nosers, Perfect Little Mayor, The Golden Horseshoe, Amazin' Grits, The Big Blue Machine, Red Tory, Squeaky. They acquired a whole new set of Canadian acronyms to go with their Washington ones: BNA, DRO, CCF, OMB, FLQ, TTCM, ACB, along with Candu, Ontario Hydro, and Wintario. Added to their American legislative language were: order paper, White paper, Green paper, Orders in Council, Privy Council, tender, free vote, Private Members Bill, private bill, Select Committee, supplementary. They encountered some new meanings for old words like 'tabling' and 'stacking the vote'.

The interns became very adept at simulating Question Period, with their "Supplementary, Mr. Speaker", "Order", "Hear, Hear," and desk thumping.

Role Models and Contacts

A sixth value is that the Toronto Internship provides accessible role models and 'contacts' for young interns. As stated by one intern. . .

"the greatest benefit to me was that it convinced me that politics is an area of endeavor I would enjoy pursuing for a living. At Queen's Park, I was immersed in politics all day long and I thoroughly enjoyed it-- it wasn't work for me, it was enjoyment. I now want to participate in politics. I believe I would use my placement, Dr. Stuart Smith, as my role model. He is an intense, compassionate man of great intelligence who cares for the downtrodden of society and is willing to speak out against staid, complacent politicians".

Journal Review Process

The Journal is reviewed by the Director weekly. A typewritten commentary is prepared on each Journal segment.

At least two of the Seminar periods are devoted to intern's questions. They select "the one best question from their own Journal which will promote group discussion". This is done with the Director and with an invited Canadian Political Scientist, who usually spends time correcting intern misperceptions. In addition, Canadian politicians and others in political life are invited in for seminar sessions. Guests in '79 included John Holtby, First Clerk Assistant to the Speaker; Jim Neubacher, reporter for the Detroit Free Press, based in Toronto; Anne Cools, Director of Women in Transition (a battered women's project) and unsuccessful Liberal candidate for a Federal Riding of Rosedale (she ran against David Crombie, former Mayor of Toronto); Peter Honey, Deputy Assistant Minister of the Treasury. In order to underscore the importance of posing good questions, interns were asked to come to the sessions with prepared questions.

Has this kind of structuring satisfied the requirements of academic

validity? Has it matched the goal of modifying and correcting idio-syncratic and parochial beliefs about the political world? One intern wrote this final observation: "To some extent, the whole thrust has been toward making a comparison between two systems which are intimately bound to each other, and yet, systems which remain and operate differently. In attempting to observe and 'study' the Canadian way, it is near to impossible not to place, even though not meaning to, some kind of value judgement on all that passes before you. There might even be a tendency to walk away from it all saying 'well, isn't that nice, but I don't think it would work at home' or 'boy I bet our own system could stand to gain a great deal by adopting some of the methods employed by the Canadians . The point of all this, I think, is not to draw a conclusion per se. Nor even to come away trying to place our system against their system. Rather, I think one must force oneself to say: "for all that it is, and all that it isn't, what is taking place here, works". It fulfills a need and serves a purpose, and one has to be able to see how that is done". I must admit that everything in my background and training has led me to believe that our system is superior. However, I believe it is still a bit early to judge the exact scope or depth of understanding that I have gained from this experience. I do think that I can say without reservation that through the people and the world that I found in Canada, I've begun to lay some of my prejudices aside, and I have also seen a tiny glimmer of those things which tie all people together".

Footnotes

1. Frantzich, Stephen, E., "Strengthening the Academic Validity of Political Science Internships: Some Possible Options". Paper delivered at the Midwest Political Science Association annual meeting, Chicago, April 19-21, 1979, p. 1.

2. Hirschfield, Robert S. and Adler, Norman M., "Internships in Politics: The CUNY Experience", PS, Volume VI, Number 1, Winter 1973, p. 16.

3. Graves, Helen M., "A Comparative Political Experience: The Toronto Internship/Seminar", Teaching Political Science, Volume 6, No. 2, January 1979, p. 230.

4. Ibid, p. 231.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid. p. 232.

7. Ibid.